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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2008

In Today's Papers

Secretary Gates Visits Turkey

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Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak and others report US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, speaking ahead of his visit to Ankara, said Turkey's assault against the PKK in northern Iraq "must not last longer than a week or two." Gates noted Turkey has to be "mindful of Iraqi sovereignty." He also warned Turkish leaders that "military activity needs to be accompanied by economic and political initiatives."

Islamist-oriented Zaman and leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet claim Gates will ask for Turkish combat troops in Afghanistan. Cumhuriyet reports Gates said he's not sure whether the US will consider cutting intelligence sharing with Turkey if the operations exceed two weeks. Mainstream Hurriyet predicts Gates will discuss with Turks the duration of the land operation, the demands for more Turkish troops in Afghanistan, a stronger Turkish approach toward Iran, and a political-economic solution to the Kurdish question.

Editorial Commentary on Gates Visit to Turkey

"Gates Sent His Message First"

Murat Yetkin is pro-American and a respected foreign affairs analyst.

He wrote in liberal Radikal (2/28): "By sending his messages prior to his arrival, Secretary Gates very wisely set the media tone for his visit to Ankara. He also provided enough time to Turkish authorities to devise answers to his remarks. Gates talked about the need for limiting the duration of the operation to two weeks. While he was making that comment, Turkey presented Gul's official invitation to Talabani in Baghdad. Talabani's visit to Ankara in the midst of military operation is unlikely. Yet by extending this invitation at this juncture, Turkey has implied that the operation will be over by the time Talabani visits Ankara, which is expected in mid-March. Credible information behind the scenes indicates that

Ankara is preparing to finish the job in two weeks' time. In other words, there is no problem as far as this part of Gates' message. Yet the other part concerning 'social and political steps to end the problem' makes Ankara uncomfortable. The government does not want to be seen as initiating certain efforts due to ethnic reasons. In that regard, the government's approach is parallel to the military's approach."

Turkey Continues Operations in Northern Iraq, Death Toll Rises on Both Sides

All papers report the military General Staff (TGS) said yesterday 77 PKK terrorists and five Turkish soldiers were killed Wednesday in operations in northern Iraq. The latest figures bring the total death toll among the rebels to 230 and among soldiers to 24. Mainstream Sabah reports Turkish troops intensified attacks once the heavy snowfall ended. The paper also notes 2,000 commandos backed by tanks were advancing towards the PKK camp in Zap. Papers report information was received alleging Kadri Celik, the mastermind of the PKK raid in Daglica last year, was killed in clashes yesterday.

Mainstream Sabah says Ankara gives the world the messages that 'Turkish operations will not continue for a long time, Turkey will avoid clashes with the Peshmerge forces, and civilians will not be hurt.' Bar Associations in 12 cities, including the mainly Kurdish ones Agri, Batman, Bingol, Bitlis, Mus and Diyarbakir, have released a joint statement calling for an end to Turkish operations in northern Iraq.

Turkish Delegation Holds 'Crisis Talks' in Baghdad
Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report on Wednesday, a Turkish delegation arrived in Baghdad to meet with Iraqi officials concerning Turkey's incursions into northern Iraq to fight against the PKK. "Our objective and mission are clear, and there is no

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withdrawal timetable until all terrorist bases are eliminated," Ahmet Davutoglu, top foreign policy advisor to PM Erdogan, told the press after talks with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari. "We are not violating Iraq's sovereign rights but securing them by removing the PKK from the region," said Davutoglu. Meanwhile, the delegation delivered a letter of invitation from President Abdullah Gul to President Talabani to visit Turkey. Talabani reportedly accepted the invitation, and said he would pay a visit "in an appropriate time."

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Incursions in Iraq

"It is Time to Win the Kurds"

Mehmet Ali Birand is a senior Turkish media figure and an expert on foreign affairs, including the EU and the US. Along with his articles, he is the senior news anchorman for the highly-rated popular television station Kanal D.

He wrote in tabloid Posta (2/28):

"Given the fact Turkish army forces are now more effective in pursuing the PKK and they seem to have complete control, the Turkish state will gain regional power by implementing a number of social, economic and political reforms. This democratic process will marginalize the PKK and weaken the ties which draw people to the PKK in the first place. The PKK will lose local support in proportion to the number of Kurdish hearts that we manage to win. In addition, the more we win Barzani over, the more the PKK will slide toward isolation. I have a message for Ankara: now is the time to act."

"The Solution to the Kurdish Problem Requires Rationale"

Semih Idiz is an expert on international relations and a senior columnist for mainstream Milliyet. He is a liberal, and addresses issues through a global perspective.

He wrote in mainstream Milliyet (2/28):

"Ankara will make a huge mistake if it only pursues military action as a solution to the Kurdish problem. The ongoing international support for Turkey cannot be a reason for comfort, because the support concerns terrorism, not Kurds. Secretary Gates mentioned the need to limit the land operations and called for economic and political steps to resolve the Kurdish issue. The essence of his remarks is shared across the board, from Iran to Washington, from

the EU to the UN. There should be ways to explore a peaceful solution to the PKK problem. There are examples, like the UK and the Basque issue in Spain, for us to examine. Most important of all, such an effort requires a rational approach versus an emotional approach. What we need is flexible wisdom and political will to address the problem. Otherwise, Ankara will be dragged into a vicious cycle of military operations. If sentimentalism prevails over rationality, Turkey will be dragged deeper and deeper into a vicious cycle."

Tensions High in Turkish Universities over Headscarf Freedom
All papers report opposition parties CHP and DSP have applied to the Constitutional Court in order to challenge the constitutional amendments related to the turban in universities.

Mainstream Vatan blames Higher Education Board (YOK) President Yusuf Ziya Ozcan for sparking tensions at universities by sending out a memo on Sunday instructing rectors to admit students wearing headscarves into university campuses. On Wednesday, students protested against headscarf freedom in Istanbul's Bogazici University, Ankara's Middle East Technical University, and universities in Eskisehir and Aydin.

The inter-university board of rectors will meet Thursday to discuss the headscarf order circulated by Ozcan. Board chairman Mustafa Akaydin warned that there was "intense religious pressure" on university rectors in eastern Turkey. Akaydin said at least half of the rectors of these universities had to allow students with headscarfs into classes due to such pressures.

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Bush Appoints US Envoy to OIC

Mainstream Milliyet reports President Bush has appointed Sada Cumber, 'a businessman from Texas,' as the US Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). White House Spokesperson Dana Perino said the OIC was an important organization that plays a constructive role. She added that President Bush wants to establish a wider dialogue with Muslims around the world.

Gallup Poll: Majority of World Muslims Moderate

Liberal Radikal carries a survey commissioned by the US-based research firm Gallup, which 'proves false the West's equation of Islam and violence.' According to the survey, 93 percent of 1.3 billion Muslims around the world are 'moderate,' and only 7 percent are 'radical.' A large majority of Muslims denounce all terrorist attacks including the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center. The survey was conducted over six years in 40 countries in one-on-one interviews with 50,000 Muslims.

TV Highlights

NTV

Domestic News

- The Izmir Bar Association has initiated an investigation against Fuat Turgut, lawyer of the suspected murderers of Hrant Dink, for making racist statements against Armenians in the courtroom during court proceedings in Istanbul last week.
- The third 'Iraqi International Fair,' which is the only fair Iraqi Trade Ministry supports abroad, will take place in the southeastern city of Gaziantep from May 22-25. More than 900 companies from 30 countries participated in last year's fair in Gaziantep.
- Russian Foreign Ministry gave Professor Ilber Ortayli, writer/poet Ataol Behramoglu, and NTV's Moscow correspondent Hasan Aksay the 'Pushkin Award' for their contribution to Russia-Turkey ties.

International News

- On Wednesday, PKK supporters criticized the US and EU for backing the Turkish offensive in northern Iraq. The criticisms came during a press conference at the EU Parliament, where the PKK supporters called on Turkey to suspend the incursions.

- Francis Fukuyama of Johns Hopkins University says the headscarf issue has become a test for the AKP.

- Turkish Environment Minister Veysel Eroglu told the closing session of the World Water Forum in Jordan the world will face a water shortage in the future, and problems related to water necessitate cooperation among countries.

WILSON